

VQ-2 DISESTABLISHMENT CEREMONY SPEECH

Admiral Buck, Captain Garvin, Commander Stockfish, men and women of VQ-2 both present and past, honored guests, and visitors. Good morning and welcome to all of you to today's ceremony, a ceremony of mixed emotions.

I know all of you are anxious to get on with the cake and refreshments, so don't worry about me taking up much of your time. My speech will be like old age, it wont last that long!

I arrived here a day early, and as usual went out the first evening to one of the local pubs on a recce mission. There was only one other person at the bar, an old man, that I thought to be a local. I thought I would engage him in a conversation to find out something about the area. I asked him the usual question about what kind of weather they have in this part of the world. He said "well it rains a lot here." Then he continued by saying "if you can see the mountains (Olympics and Cascades) that means it is going to rain." He then said "if you can't see the mountains, it's already raining!"

First of all, I want to congratulate VQ-2 Skipper CDR Mark Stockfish on his Navy career accomplishments. It is not every

day that you find a true "Mustang" Commanding Officer of a Navy ship or squadron. It was undoubtedly a long and tough road from airman, to Chief Petty Officer, to a commission, and finally to the much sought after goal of being the Commanding Officer of a world class squadron! Great Job Mark. I salute you Sir!

We are here today to say farewell to an old friend and to honor that old friend for years of excellence in airborne electronic reconnaissance. We are here today to witness our beloved VQ-2 transferring to the history files of the Navy historical museum in Washington, D.C., and into the fond memories of all of us.

It is not unusual to humanize an inanimate object, especially one that conjures up such strong emotions as does VQ-2. This squadron seems to be alive, a part of us, and one whose collective memories shall remain with us for the rest of our days. What exactly is a Navy squadron? In its simplest form, it is a collection of aircraft, equipment, people, a mission, and a set of operating instructions. However, once a person becomes a veteran of a particular squadron, especially one as unique as VQ-2, it takes on a different form. The unit morphs into a life-like form and an important segment of you life. It lives, it is an unquantifiable entity that will drift in and out of

your consciousness. The friends you made, and those you lost, the unforgettable experiences, the close calls, the life lessons you learned, the sea stories you heard and were a part of. All those things are forever a part of your psyche – a part of who you are. It provides a sense of place and time, like no other life experience can do.

It is indeed a daunting task to capture the historical essence of, and to appropriately honor, the 57 years of exemplary operations of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Two. We will not be able to do justice to that task here today.

In 1986, while I was a Professor at the NWC in Newport, I received a phone call from the SecNav staff. At this time SecNav John Lehman was in a struggle with Congress to acquire funding for a follow-on platform to our carrier-based capability, the aging EA-3B Skywarrior. To prepare himself for the debates, he had asked his staff to call the Navy History Museum at the Navy Yard in D.C. and have them send him the histories of the two Navy VQ squadrons. When he found there was no histories on file for these two squadrons because of the classified mission, I was tabbed to write one, and to do so in a hurry. Thanks to my many years of experience in VQ, and many contacts with the retired old timers, I was able to gather the needed data and photographs to write the histories of VQ-1

and VQ-2 from their beginnings in the World War Two era, up to the cut off date of 1986. But, unfortunately, I was directed to leave out the tons of sea stories these two squadrons had amassed over the years. To garner some publicity, these histories were then passed on to the Tail Hook Magazine by SecNav and printed in the spring and summer 1986 issues. Fortunately, these articles won the Tail hook Magazine's "articles of the year" award and a free trip for me to the Tail hook Convention at the Hilton Hotel in Las Vegas. Thank goodness I did not make it to the next years infamous Tail hook Convention because I was elsewhere on TAD. You will remember that was the year when so much fun was had on the third floor!

Since then, these two VQ squadron histories have been inducted into the Cold War Museum in Virginia, and they are available on line at www.coldwar.org. Shortly after their induction, the museum director, Gary Powers, Jr., asked me to write a short update on the two squadrons since 1986, and that is also available at the same on-line site. Now, when the disestablishment ceremony here today is complete, I suppose it will be time to write the final chapter of the long and proud history of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Two.

From its origins in the post-WWII era, VQ-2's function of electronic reconnaissance began a long evolution. It started from a three-plane detachment of VP-114, flying PB4Y-1 Liberator aircraft and based at Port Lyautey, French Morocco. The parent squadron was redesigned as VP-HL-6, then VP-26, and then finally transferred to CONUS during the summer of 1950. At this time, the electronic reconnaissance assets remained in Port Lyautey and were formed as NAF Patrol Unit, flying the PB4Y-2 Privateer aircraft. By 1951, the unit's Privateers were replaced by four P4M-1Q Mercators and a stripped P2V Neptune for pilot training. By May 1953, NAF Patrol Unit was redesigned as VW-2 Detachment Able. Growing out of VW-2 Det Able, the unit began life as a separate squadron named ECMRON Two and assigned the designator VQ-2 on 1 September 1955. We begin our official lineage of the squadron from this date.

In 1958, the squadron relocated to Rota, Spain and to then NAS Whidbey Island, Washington in 2005. Through this period, the squadron aircraft were updated from the P4M-1Q Mercator to the EC-121M Super Connie or "Willie Victor" in 1960, and finally the EP-3E Orion in 1971. Earlier in 1956, the squadron received the EA-3B Skywarrior, affectionately known as the Whale, as a carrier asset. In 1960, the official

name of the squadron was changed from ECMRON Two to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Two. The first women were assigned to the squadron in the early 1980s and were allowed to compete for air crew status later in that decade. Over the years, the men and women of VQ-2 have flown a mixture of national peripheral reconnaissance, Navy fleet support, and combat ISR missions. These missions have been flown from forward bases throughout the globe, and from the decks of our Navy aircraft carriers.

Because of the inherently dangerous nature of flying around the periphery of nations hostile to the United States, operating off aircraft carriers and remote land bases, along with the normal hazards of the aviation trade, over the years VQ-1 and 2 together have lost a total of eleven aircraft and 217 of our people. Of these paying the ultimate price, 77 were lost in hostile actions and the remaining 140 to accidents. It is ironic that the names of the last four of a VQ-2 EA-3B crew lost during the Vietnam conflict, have recently been etched on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in D.C. These names will be unveiled at a ceremony on Memorial Day, just ten days from now. Indeed history shows our trade carries the same risk of hostile action in peace as it does in war. Our version of peacetime was described quite well by Thomas Jefferson. He said "peacetime

is that glorious moment in history when everyone stands around reloading.”

During the years since VQ-2 was established, SecNav Lehman’s 1980s vision of a 600 ship Navy has dwindled to one of less than 300 ships. Many ships, squadrons and activities have been put on the chopping block. In my history of the VQ squadrons, written back in 1986, I lament about the lack of support for the Navy’s “soft kill” assets, which includes the VQ community. It is the large “hard kill” or “weapons delivering” communities that have the horsepower to best survive during hard fiscal times. With only three admirals selected from our VQ community throughout its existence, we have had to work extra hard to sell our “soft kill force multiplier” capability. With the current challenging fiscal period, even our usual “full court press” has not been enough, and we find ourselves now losing both VQ-2 and VPU-1 to the chopping block in less than a month.

Yes, life over the years for the VQ community has not been easy. In addition to accomplishing our difficult and dangerous mission, for most of our existence we have had to function as our own wing, our own RAG and do most of our own other pipeline training. We have had to fight a host of entities for our very existence. Fighting “Hostile takeovers” have always been

a routine part of our activity. I have often been reminded of the phrase “We have met the enemy and it is us!”

What we are losing with these VQ and VPU squadrons is the “team in the sky and at the same time, a team plugged firmly into the operational environment.” This team is capable of the timely and operationally-oriented fusion of differing data into what the operational commanders need on scene and what they need right now. The airborne human collaborative decision making and fusion capability these two units have, cannot be replicated effectively with any existing technology. There is yet another loss with VQ-2 and VPU-1 now gone. We will have two less commands to grow our Captains that are so vitally needed on major staffs and in program offices.

Yes, we are promised a future enhanced ISR capability in “the family of ISR sensors” concept. This concept splits the already slim Navy professional EW/ISR cadre into small slices and places them into overhead systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and as an add-ons to several existing Naval aviation communities. Undoubtedly, in the future as funding becomes even tighter, these “parent” communities will predictably elect to protect their own basic missions at the expense of the aerial electronic reconnaissance mission. However, I must admit to finding a few positive qualities to the unmanned aircraft

portion of the VQ replacement. UAVs won't be late for briefings; they won't start fights at happy hour, and they won't purchase large wristwatches and drive small flashy convertible automobiles.

Since I found out about the disestablishment of both VQ-2 and VPU-1, the two squadrons I commanded during my Navy career, I will admit to feeling some degree of paranoia! As a matter of fact I have been watching the mail closely expecting notice that my tree farms in Alabama are to be redesignated as a National Park and my home closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) act!

I note that Captain Keith May is in the audience today. He is the President of, and representing our VQ Association. It is ironic and by chance that he and I were the only two VQ-2 Commanding Officers of Native American blood. Both of us are from Alabama's Muscogee Creek Nation. In the Creek Indian social system, when a person, animal, or even an important inanimate object dies, its spirit is released in a brief, but important ritual ceremony. This act was believed to allow that spirit to forever remain with its kind here on mother earth. On 31 August 2012, the official date of VQ-2's disestablishment, electrical message traffic will be sent that will officially end the life of the squadron, and it will materially

cease to exist. However, to ensure the spirit of the squadron will exist forever, on that same date, I assure you there will be a “Sako En-thle-cha-beta,” or Release of Spirit ceremony held.

The spirit of the squadron will then be officially released by two worlds – an ancient traditional one and a modern one of technology. Its spirit can then remain with us VQ veterans, us band of brothers and sisters, as long as the sun shines and the wind blows.

This brings to mind “The Trail of Tears” era of the eastern Native American removals to the west during President Andrew Jackson’s presidency. The disestablishment of VQ-2 today can be viewed as another “Trail of Tears.” This time, it is not a society, but an institution that is forced to move on for the sake of economics, and someone’s idea of manifest destiny. This act will someday be viewed as a mistake in our military history. At sometime in the future, when all vestiges of the VQ community are gone from the scene, we will look back on the loss of this capability as a bad move, and will sadly note its negative impact on Naval operations. Then, of course, as history has shown over and over, we will have to reinvent the VQ capability, at great cost.

As we leave this ceremony today, we do so with a mix of emotions. First of all, we can all go away with a great sense of

pride for what this squadron, its planes, people and mission have done over the past 57 years in support of our national defense. On the other hand, we go with heavy hearts, that VQ-2 will no longer physically exist – its birds will no longer roost on the flight lines and carrier decks and its dedicated people no longer conduct their vital mission of airborne electronic reconnaissance.

When the final word has been written about VQ-2, it will not be just a history, it will be a lasting legacy – This squadron will be viewed by future generations of the Naval Aviation Community as an icon of dedication and sense of mission, personified by a band of talented gypsies that skillfully executed a vital national and Navy mission using hand-me-

down assets. ^{may the phrase} ETERNAL VIGILANCE IS THE PRICE OF LIBERTY

Thank you for your attention and patience!

REMAIN
WITH YOU
AS AN ETERNAL
REMEMBER OF THIS
GREAT SQUADRON!